

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,)	
)	Filed 9/26/96
Plaintiff,)	
)	
v.)	Civil Action No.
)	CV96-6515
IXTLERA DE SANTA CATARINA,)	
S.A. DE C.V.; and)	
MFC CORPORATION,)	
)	
Defendants.)	

COMPLAINT

The United States of America, plaintiff, by its attorneys, acting under the direction of the Attorney General of the United States, brings this civil action to obtain equitable and other relief against the defendants named herein, and complains and alleges as follows.

Since at least January 1990 to at least April 1995, the defendants and certain co-conspirators have reached various agreements designed to lessen and eliminate competition for tampico fiber imported into and sold in the United States. Specifically, the defendants agreed with unnamed co-conspirators to fix the prices of tampico fiber imported into the United States, to fix the resale prices charged by MFC Corporation and another United States distributor for tampico fiber, and to allocate tampico fiber sales between MFC Corporation and that other distributor.

The instant action seeks to enjoin the defendants from renewing their unlawful agreements.

I

DEFENDANTS

1. Ixtlera de Santa Catarina, S.A. de C.V. ("Ixtlera") is a Mexican corporation with offices in Santa Catarina and Monterrey, Mexico. Ixtlera processes tampico fiber and is the sole source of supply for tampico fiber sold in the United States by MFC Corporation. Ixtlera is one of only two large suppliers of processed tampico fiber in the world. Ixtlera and the other large supplier, which was a co-conspirator, each sold through exclusive United States distributors.

2. MFC Corporation ("MFC") is a corporation organized and existing under the laws of the State of Texas with offices in Laredo, Texas. MFC is Ixtlera's exclusive distributor for tampico fiber in North America.

II

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

3. This complaint is filed under Section 4 of the Sherman Act, as amended (15 U.S.C. § 4) in order to prevent and restrain violations, as hereinafter alleged, by the defendants of Section 1 of the Sherman Act (15 U.S.C. § 1).

4. This Court has jurisdiction over this matter pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331 and 1337.

5. Venue is properly laid in this district under 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b)(2) because the combination and conspiracy alleged herein has been carried out, in part, within the Eastern District of Pennsylvania through, among other things, sales made by the

conspirators. As to Ixtlera, venue is also proper under 28 U.S.C. § 1391(d).

6. The defendants further consent to jurisdiction and waive any objection as to venue.

III

TRADE AND COMMERCE

7. Tampico fiber is a natural vegetable fiber produced by the lechuguilla plant and grown in the deserts of northern Mexico. It is harvested by individual farmers, processed, finished, and exported worldwide, where it is used as brush filling material for industrial and consumer brushes. It is available in natural white, bleached white, black, gray and a wide variety of mixtures.

8. Ixtlera is one of the two largest suppliers of processed tampico fiber worldwide. Ixtlera supplies tampico fiber in the United States through sales made by MFC.

9. MFC had United States sales of tampico fiber of approximately \$14.7 million during the period January 1990 through April 1995. During the period covered by this complaint, there has been a continuous and uninterrupted flow in interstate commerce of tampico fiber from Ixtlera to MFC and its United States customers. There also has been a continuous and uninterrupted flow in interstate commerce of tampico fiber from a co-conspirator Mexican processor and its exclusive United States distributor to customers throughout the United States. The activities of the defendants and their co-conspirators have been

within the flow of, and have substantially affected, interstate commerce.

IV

CONCERTED ACTIONS

10. Various firms and individuals, not made defendants in this complaint, participated as co-conspirators with the defendants in the violations herein alleged, and performed acts and made statements in furtherance thereof.

V

ALLEGED VIOLATIONS

COUNT ONE

11. The defendants and co-conspirators, through their officers and employees, agreed to fix and maintain the prices of tampico fiber imported into the United States.

12. In furtherance thereof, they periodically met, discussed and agreed upon such prices.

13. That agreement constituted a combination or conspiracy in unreasonable restraint of trade and commerce in violation of Section 1 of the Sherman Act, 15 U.S.C. § 1.

14. Unless prevented and restrained, the defendants may renew the unlawful agreement alleged herein.

COUNT TWO

15. In order to monitor and maintain the conspiracy to fix and maintain the prices of tampico fiber imported into the United States, the defendants and co-conspirators, through their officers and employees, agreed to fix and maintain the resale

prices charged by MFC and the other leading supplier's exclusive United States distributor for sales of tampico fiber.

16. In furtherance thereof, they periodically met, discussed, agreed upon and implemented such prices.

17. That agreement constituted a combination or conspiracy in unreasonable restraint of trade and commerce in violation of Section 1 of the Sherman Act, 15 U.S.C. § 1.

18. Unless prevented and restrained, the defendants may renew the unlawful agreement alleged herein.

COUNT THREE

19. In order to monitor and maintain the conspiracy to fix and maintain the prices of tampico fiber imported into the United States, the defendants and co-conspirators, through their officers and employees, agreed to allocate tampico fiber sales volume between MFC and the other leading supplier's exclusive United States distributor.

20. In furtherance thereof, they periodically reviewed the sales of their United States distributors.

21. That agreement constituted a combination or conspiracy in unreasonable restraint of trade and commerce in violation of Section 1 of the Sherman Act, 15 U.S.C. § 1.

22. Unless prevented and restrained, the defendants may renew the unlawful agreement alleged herein.

VI

EFFECTS

23. The aforesaid combination and conspiracy has had the following effects, among others:

- (a) prices of tampico fiber imported into the United States have been fixed and maintained;
- (b) resale prices of United States distributors of tampico fiber have been fixed and maintained;
- (c) sales volume between the United States distributors of tampico fiber has been allocated; and
- (d) competition in the sale of tampico fiber has been restrained, suppressed and eliminated.

VII

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, plaintiff respectfully prays for relief as follows.

24. That this Court adjudge and decree that defendants and co-conspirators have entered into unlawful contracts, combinations, or conspiracies which unreasonably restrain trade in interstate commerce, in violation of Section 1 of the Sherman Act, 15 U.S.C. § 1.

25. That defendants, their officers, directors, agents, employees, successors and all persons, firms and corporations acting on their behalf and under their direction or control be enjoined from engaging in, carrying out, renewing or attempting to engage in, carry out or renew, the combinations and

conspiracies herein alleged, or from engaging in any other combination or conspiracy having similar purposes or effects.

26. That plaintiff have such other relief that the Court may consider necessary, just, or appropriate to restore competitive conditions in the markets affected by the defendants unlawful conduct.

27. That plaintiff recover the costs of this action.

Dated:

Respectfully submitted,

/s/

JOEL I. KLEIN
Acting Assistant Attorney General

/s/

EDWARD S. PANEK

/s/

REBECCA P. DICK
Deputy Director of Operations

/s/

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